

History of Post Office

New Building Is High Spot in Newark Mail Service

The new Post Office and Federal Building, costing \$6,150,000, which was occupied for two weeks, marked a high point in the city's postal progress from colonial days when mail service was a free private enterprise run by a newspaper.

The newspaper, The New Jersey Gazette, first paper published in this state and one of the best in the country, enjoyed a circulation throughout New Jersey. As a convenience to readers the publishers allowed their dispatch riders to carry their patrons' letters free while delivering papers.

During the Revolution these riders were subjected to the risk of capture by British troops, who were usually equipped with better mounts, and the added burden of a mail pouch was a serious hindrance. The citizenry began to rely on this free private mail service and the proprietors of The Gazette were loath to discontinue it.

Asks for Pay

In April, 1778, a notice appeared in the newspaper that "The Newark Post will not carry letters unless they are paid for it." The days of free postal service in Newark were ended.

This private service continued until 1790, when President Washington appointed John Burnet Newark's first postmaster. Burnet was the son of Dr. William Burnet, one of the town's leading patriots. The doctor was a close friend of Washington and the son's appointment represented the first instance of postmaster's patronage, as far as Newark was concerned. Burnet conducted the business in his store in Broad street, where the Kinney Building stands today.

In 1804, because of a shift in politics, Burnet lost the position and his successor was Matthias Day, an appointee of President Thomas Jefferson. Day established the office at the northeast corner of Broad street and what is now Edison place. He was Newark's postmaster for thirty years, a record that has never been equaled.

Salary Based on Receipts.

During the course of Day's long term he moved the Post Office to what is now Broad street and Raymond boulevard, later the site of the old Center Market. The salary in those days was based on a percentage of receipts, and in the last year Day's earnings were \$1,591. Day was removed by President Jackson, the most outspoken advocate of "to the victor belongs the spoils."

In 1835, the year before Newark obtained its charter, Day's successor, Pruden Alling, moved the postal headquarters to 283 Broad street, between Market and Clinton streets. In those days the odd numbers were on the east side of Broad street, the reverse of the rule today.

It was the custom until 1855 to have the Post Office in the store or business establishment of the postmaster. In that year the government purchased the property at Broad and Academy streets from the Newark Academy and the school was moved to High and William streets. The first government owned Post Office opened in 1858.

Building Outgrown

Because of the growth of the city the postal facilities were again found inadequate, and in 1894 the government started the erection of a Romanesque style building. The plans for this structure were supposed to have been intended for Wilmington, Del., a much smaller city, but when the building was finished in 1898, Newarkers were well pleased with the new building. It was even an inspiration for local poets.

During the period of construction the old edifice of the First Baptist Church, now the First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church, was used as post office. The church building had been used several years as an annex.

In 1897 the postal receipts were \$342,000, but by 1909 the receipts passed the \$1,000,000 mark annually, and the citizens' chorus for larger postal quarters began to be sung, even though the government expended \$300,000 to enlarge the building in 1903.

A committee of citizens was appointed in 1912 to look into the matter of a new building. In 1921 the city's first branch office was opened in the Roseville section and a second one was established in the Clinton Hill section the next year. The land for the present building between Franklin and Walnut streets was acquired in 1931 and the ground was broken August 26, 1932. The work of erection was started three days later.

Cost of Building.

The land cost about \$3,000,000 and the building about the same. The building, a five-story and a half affair of Italian classical design, marked the high point in the centralization of federal agencies. The site area is 166,000 square feet and the total square feet of floor space is 475,000. The architects were William E. Lehman and George O. Totten Jr. and the construction engineer was Major Willis B. Hayes of the Treasury Department.

The cornerstone of the building was laid April 21, 1934, by Postmaster General Farley, but it was not until March 30 of this year that the building was opened for business. Postmaster John F. Sinnott Jr., the present incumbent, epitomized the postal status of the city in the announcement of the 1935 revenue of \$4,540,406, a gain of nearly \$200,000 over 1934, and more than four times the receipts of 1909.

The building will be dedicated Saturday at 2 P. M. in a brief program. American flags will be presented by Newark Post, American Legion, and Bertram Kinnamon Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars. Brief talks will be given by Postmaster Sinnott, former Postmaster Bock, Mayor Ellenstein, former Mayor Jerome T. Congleton and a representative of Postmaster General Farley's office.

After the speeches the spectators will view the building. A great many people already have inspected the edifice in the weeks it has been open and have been impressed by its beauty and the facilities which Newark had lacked for years in the old post office, but there have been no poetic outbursts yet.

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